

Materials, Methods, and Methodologies

Asma and Taylor

Materials, Methods, and Methodologies

In addition to Asma's story and my "Field Notes," the following recordings will work as an analytical exploration of particular themes about culture, narrative, and what Asma's story says about these ideas. In lieu of an introductory chapter, this first recording will work as a kind of overview of the project: what I found inspiration in, what I sought to do, and what Asma and I eventually created. This "season" will end with a recording from Asma herself, in which she has a chance to respond to my analysis and reflect on this process as a whole.

your right

But I'm getting a bit ahead of myself here. Let's start with the introduction and move from there.

This ethnographic project does not follow any particular sort of precedent. Its form, organization, arrangement, and tone are utterly different from any of the work that I have encountered in my undergraduate education at Kenyon.

However, it does take inspiration from a few sources and resources. Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa* comes to mind, as it is an in-depth, incredibly personal ethnographic work that focuses on a single woman's story. My feminist lens and approach to this process thus took inspiration from Shostak's process, and I innovated from there. As opposed to a typical life history, Asma's and my interviews felt more like conversations. I did not actively try to remain objective or silent throughout this process. Asma and I were in dialogue constantly, and the conversation shifted organically between her own story, our current lives, and discussion of the project itself. I was a sympathetic, empathetic listener, and Asma and I developed a friendship over the course of this work.

The collaborative aspect of this ethnography was also integral to my inspiration and methodology. In an article on collaborative ethnography, Lassiter asks, "what happens when we collaboratively read and interpret the ethnographic text *alongside* our consultants *as it develops*—not just sitting down to verify quotes, for example (which is merely bureaucratic), but using the developing text as the centerpiece of evolving ongoing conversation?" (2001: 139).

This quote perfectly encapsulates what I wanted to do with Asma when we first sat down and started talking, and it really has come to fruition. Together, we decided what this story meant, what it could mean, and how we would share it. It has been a continual conversation—one which persists even now—about what would be the *best* way for Asma to tell and share her story.

yes

As such, it is clear that the *story* is center to this project. Rios and Sands' *Telling a Good One: The Process of a Native American Collaborative Ethnography* was a key inspiration for that focus, as Sands uses her work to explain how the story can be lost in the analysis and manipulation of ethnographic creation. My analysis, then, culminates in a series of "Field Notes" that I recorded, completely improvised, throughout this process, as well as some more detailed thoughts in this collection of recordings you are currently listening to. I am also including a kind of annotated bibliography with resources and research that I found useful as Asma and I worked to create this project.

great project

Consequently, you will not find any generalizing conclusions about "the refugee's experience," "the Muslim woman's experience," "the immigrant mother's experience"... Asma's story may

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throughout our conversations. After reading and listening to everything, Asma decided how she wanted to organize her story in its edited form, and she and I agreed that I would do the arranging and sound editing necessary to reduce nearly eighteen hours into something that a listener would be able to understand and enjoy. The final product is about three hours long, edited through Audacity, and uploaded through Archive.org. I also transcribed all of these collections, and Asma annotated them with her own thoughts and reactions to the "episodes" we created.

great

The episodes are then uploaded to a Wix website that I created. The platform also contains transcripts of each episode, as well as my "Field Notes," analysis, the annotated bibliography, and some other creative elements.

I loved it
😊

Finally, I would like to take a moment to share a bit about mine and Asma's relationship with one another. Since this project is actively reflexive and collaborative, the power dynamics between the ethnographer and her collaborator are key here.

As a young, unmarried, non-Muslim, white, upper-middle-class, female student at a liberal arts college, I definitely held a certain level of simultaneous privilege and ignorance. Throughout our conversations, my authority most prominently lay in my apparent educational expertise. She started her college journey during this project's creation, so she tended to admit her inexperience with speaking and writing in English.

yes, yes.
I'm on my way.
I'm very exciting on the future.

Alternately, Asma, as a married mother of three who is a former refugee from a predominantly Muslim African nation, holds a different set of experiences and statuses in United States culture and society. However, she also had a great deal of authority that came with her age, experiences as a wife and mother, and a Muslim woman, as well as the wisdom and worldliness (and trauma) that came from being alone and stateless at a remarkably young age, as well as starting entirely over in a new country on the other side of the world.

The risks and benefits presented by this project are the clearest evidence of the power dynamic. This is an honors project for me, one which I have chosen to complete on my own time, outside my typical studies. While I have the potential to receive academic honors for this work—if a committee deems it worthy—Asma does not receive any sort of monetary or academic gain from this. If anything, taking the time out of her busy schedule and sharing deeply personal, and sometimes painful, memories in order to share her story with a wider audience presents more risks than benefits.

However, Asma is not "my subject," "my interviewee," or even "my consultant." She is "my collaborator," one who has an equal, if not dominant, say in her narrative and how it is portrayed. Moreover, Asma herself has expressed a feeling of confidence as she tells her story. Our conversations are a "break" from her daily life, and she repeatedly says how much she has enjoyed this process. Asma wants to share her story, and we both hope that this first project will provide a foundation for a book she hopes to write in the future. We also both hope that sharing this story will open peoples' hearts and minds to the breadth and depth of a person's experience, and that labels like "Muslim" or "refugee" cannot come close to capturing such a life.

yes
😊